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Editorial Contact

email: ARL-DG-NMCPProceedings
@uscg.mil

Editor, *Proceedings* Magazine
U.S. Coast Guard
National Maritime Center
4200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 730
Arlington, VA 22203-1804

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Champion's Point of View



by CAPT MICHAEL B. KARR
Chief, U.S. Coast Guard Office of Vessel Activities

During the U.S. Coast Guard's long history, assuring safety in the marine environment has been our most traditional mission; and the personnel of the Coast Guard are very proud of this heritage. Much of our effort is directed at prevention. We perform regular vessel inspection and regulation enforcement activities in an ongoing effort to secure the marine environment and assure vessel safety.

Despite these efforts, however, maritime casualties do occur, and the Coast Guard stands ready to respond to these incidents. A marine casualty incident can last for weeks as an ongoing event, beginning with intense and risky search and rescue operations, fire-fighting, or damage control, and transitioning to waterway closures, marine traffic control issues, salvage efforts, and pollution response.

In this edition of *Proceedings*, we will take a close look at nearly a dozen recent marine casualties. We will explore how each of these incidents occurred, including any environmental, vessel design, or human error factor that contributed to each event. We will outline the U.S. Coast Guard Marine Casualty Investigations that followed; and describe in detail the lessons learned through the investigation of these incidents, and any changes in maritime regulations that occurred as a result of those investigations.

I believe that reading the experiences of others can reduce marine casualties, especially if the reader can identify with those experiences. In my case, I keep many instances of maritime lessons learned on my mind. In particular, I can readily identify with the marine safety regulatory agency leadership in place during the sinking of the *General Slocum* in 1904, and do not want to repeat its mistakes. The lessons learned from the *General Slocum* serve to motivate me to prevent those organizational failures from happening again, today.¹

It is important to note that lives were lost in some of the marine casualties we present in this edition. These were tragedies not only for those whose lives were lost, but also for the family and crewmembers who remain. Out of respect for all these people, the reports presented here mention no names of any person involved in any of the incidents.

Some of these incidents were catalysts for major changes in maritime regulations. Some occurred because those involved ignored these regulations. It is our intention to publicize the lessons learned from each of these incidents to educate the maritime community. In so doing, we hope to prevent similar incidents in the future.

¹ For more information on the General Slocum investigation see the *Proceedings* October – December 2003 issue and the "Report of the United States Commission of Investigation Upon the Disaster to the Steamer *General Slocum*" at <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-m/moa/reportindexcas2.htm>